DALLAS MORNING NEWS(TX)
16 April 1986

# Publicity to complicate U.S. spying, experts say

## Libya expected to tighten up methods of communication

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*Washington Bureau of The News*

WASHINGTON — President Reagan's public confirmation that U.S. intelligence intercepted messages showing Libya to be behind the April 5 bombing in Berlin will make it hard to tap such communications again, experts said Tuesday.

"It's not uncharitable to call it a lucky break," said a former senior U.S. intelligence official. "And likely as not, because of the disclosure, it will be a good deal of time before we have another break this lucky."

Terrorists usually operate in small "cells" of two or three people, making it almost impossible to discover their plans, this and other experts noted. But Libya under Col. Moammar Khadafy has been either bold or careless about disguising its involvement in terrorism.

"Our intelligence has really solid goodies on Libya," said a current U.S. official, who demanded anonymity. "The Libyans are not noted for their super-sophisticated telemetry, and they also bluster and brag a lot. Their messages are readily picked out of the air."

But that will change, the experts agreed, following Reagan's confirmation on television Monday night that the United States had intercepted messages between Tripoli and the Libyan People's Bureau in East Berlin on March 25, April 4 and after the April 5 bombing.

"They'll change codes and they'll change methods of communicating," said the former senior intelligence official. "The president went very far last night in giving away the obvious source of access. So you're not likely to get information (that way) for a long time."

George Carver, a former deputy director of the CIA, complained that Reagan "was so detailed that it may be a very long time before we get anything like that comparable quality, and as a result, Americans might die."

But others said the judgment was akin to decisions presidents have made through the years, taking the chance of revealing intelligence sources and methods in order to win political support for actions involving war or the threat of it.

"The commander in chief determined that it was in the interest of the country to open up and explain that we had intelligence to support the attack on Khadafy for the disco bombing," said John Greaney, executive director of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers and a 32-year CIA veteran.

"In 1962, when the Soviets were sending missiles into Cuba," Greaney recalled, "the president (John F. Kennedy) went public with the photographs we had of the Soviet missiles. Not many people realized that we had a capability to take those kinds of picture in those days."

"It's a political judgment," said another former intelligence official. "You have to give some specifics if you're going to get support."

"You're willing to pay that price to get the support of your country and your allies," said retired Adm. Daniel Murphy, who sat on the National Security Planning Group at the White House when he was chief of staff to Vice President George Bush.

These intelligence experts also predicted that U.S. ability to intercept Libyan communications — and Libya's tendency to use electronic communications — could return to normal before very long.

"The odds are that eventually they'll go back to (electronic messages)," said the former senior intelligence official. The alternative is to use couriers, this expert said.

Greaney argued that the Libyan intercepts show that the U.S. intelligence community is improving its ability to help combat terrorism. He said those who discerned the messages between Tripoli and the East Berlin People's Bureau deserved credit for their diligence.

The 60,000 or so civilian and military employees of the National Security Agency can use satellites and earthbound listening devices to intercept almost any radio or telephone conversation or any cable or telex transmission in the world. The bigger problem is sorting through what is intercepted.

"This demonstrates the vigilance with which the intelligence community is working on the terrorists," Greaney said.

But Greaney and others cautioned that terrorists rarely make it so easy to spy on them. Spy planes and satellites, known as "national technical means," and what is called "COMINT" — communications intelligence, or interception of communications signals — seldom work against terrorists.

"The overhead systems will generally tell you where terrorist training is taking place, but they don't tell you who's being trained and where they go from there," said Rob Simmons, former staff director of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Communications intelligence is usually of minimal use, Simmons said, because "terrorist groups are usually extremely small, and while in the course of a terrorist event they may communicate between themselves and with the outside world, they generally don't talk before they go into action. So a second important means is of marginal assistance."

This leaves "HUMINT," or human intelligence — the infiltration of agents into terrorist groups. But penetrating terrorist groups is almost impossible, the experts say.

To illustrate the point, one intelligence expert cited a widespread belief in intelligence circles that one of the American hostages missing in Beirut was the CIA station chief and was captured by Shiite terrorists when he was trying to make contact with a Shiite he thought might be willing to become an agent.

"Terrorist groups are small, they are highly disciplined, they keep close track of their members, and it's very difficult to insert somebody into the group itself," said Simmons.

For these reasons, said Greaney: "Intelligence is, a great many times, more good luck than good management. You don't always have it, that's the problem."